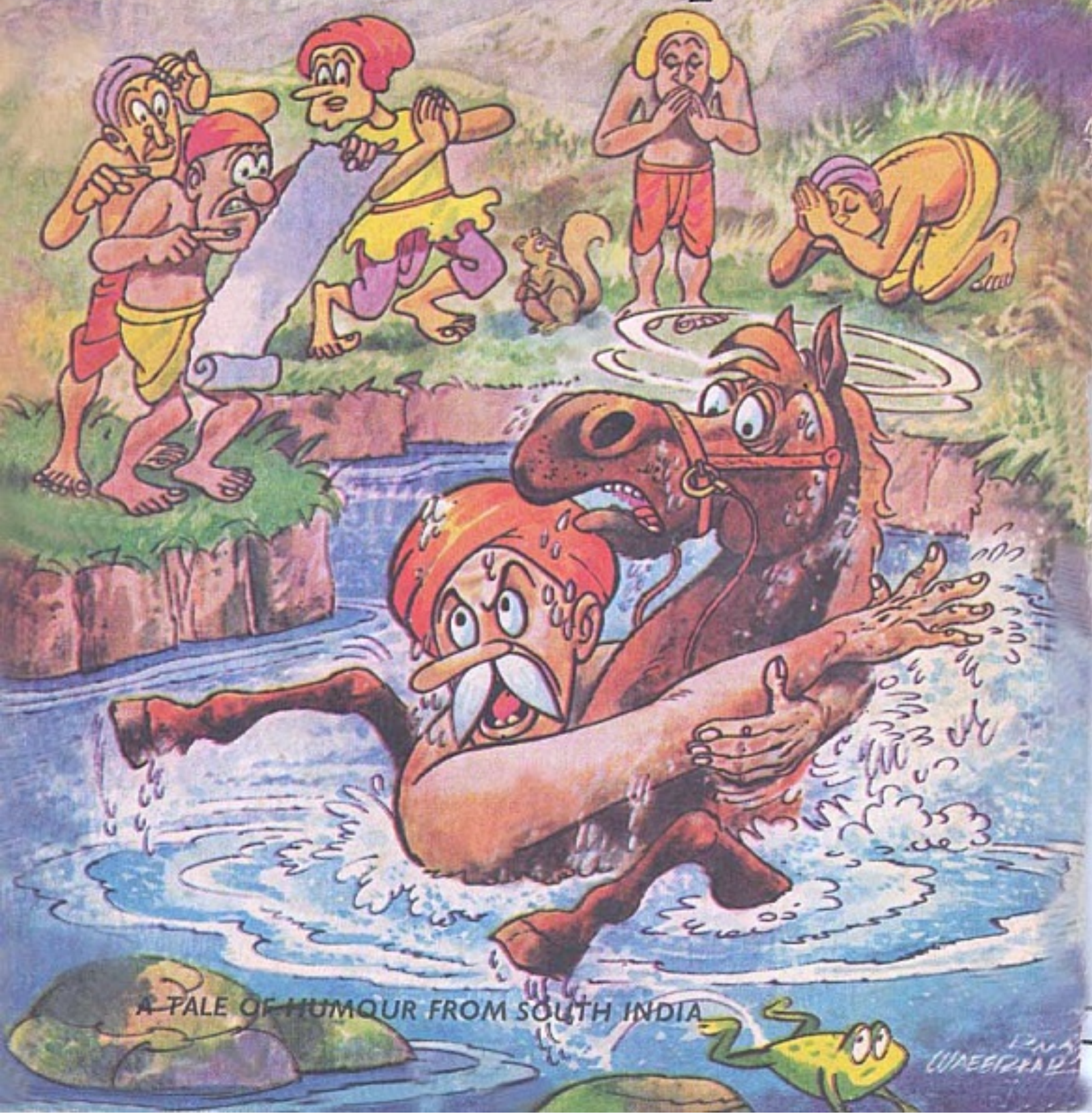




No. 261

The Fool's Disciples



A TALE OF HUMOUR FROM SOUTH INDIA

PAUL
UNABIRNAR

This ChitraKatha is adapted from a Tamil book written by an Italian priest, Fr. C. J. Beschi. The book is one of the earliest prose works in the Tamil language.

Fr. Beschi, or Veeramamunivar as he was known, came to India in the 17th century and settled down in Madurai. He studied Sanskrit, Telugu and Tamil and became proficient in all three languages.

Besides *Paramartha Guru* he has several other books to his credit. He also wrote the first dictionary in Tamil and a treatise on Tamil grammar.

Whatever might have been the intention of Fr. Beschi in writing these tales, over the years they gained increasing popularity in Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. *The Guru* is known by the name Paramananda in Andhra Pradesh and as Gampa Gurū in Karnataka. In Kannada several stories, skits and essays have been written with the Gampa Guru as the central character. In fact a distinct school of humour named *Gampa Sahitya* has come into being in Kannada.

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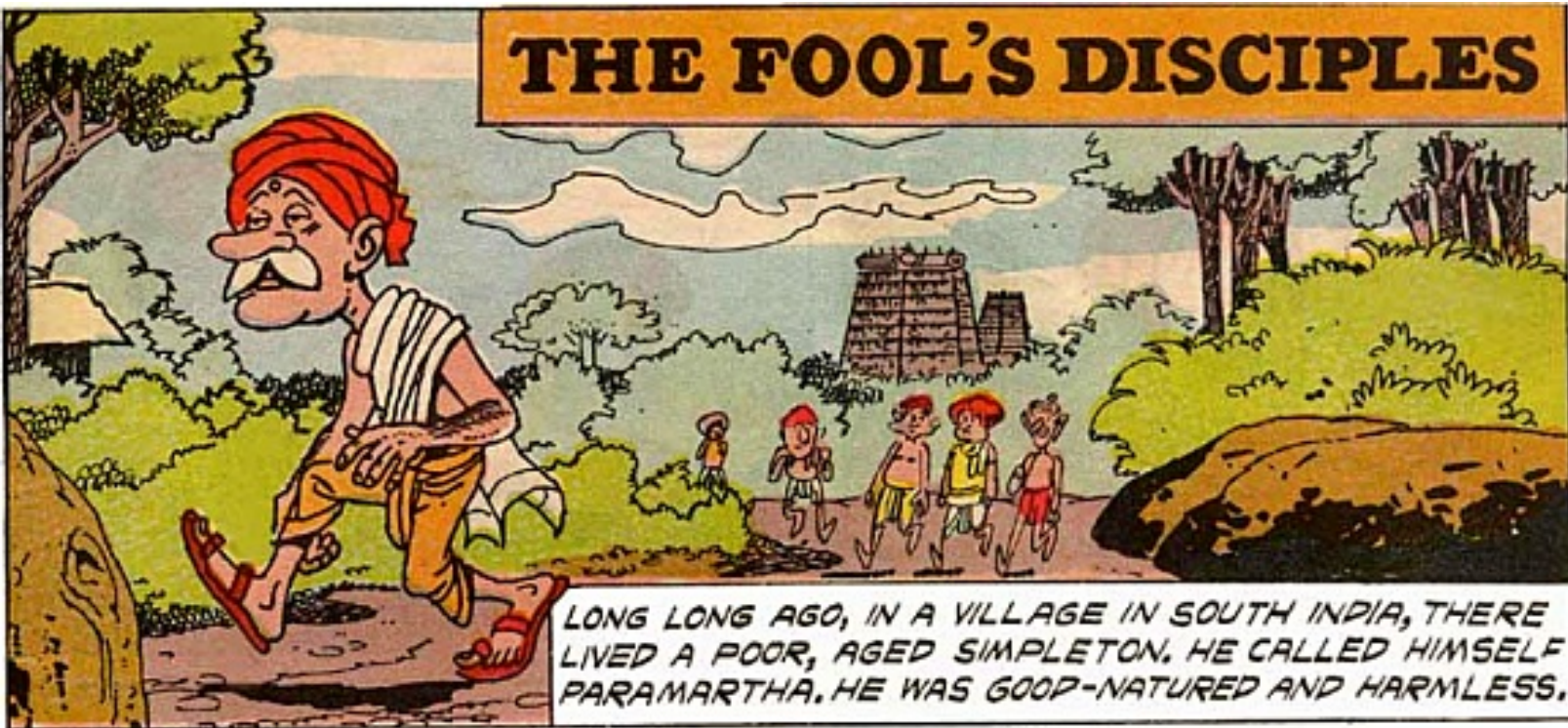
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Published by H.G. Mirchandani for India Book House Education Trust, Rusi Mansion, 29 Nathalal Parekh Marg, Bombay 400 039 and printed by him at IBH Printers, Marol Naka, Mathuradas Vissanji Road, Andheri (East), Bombay-400 059.

Editor : Anant Pai Script: Indira Anantakrishnan & Pratibha N. G.

Artworks: Ram Waeerkar

THE FOOL'S DISCIPLES



LONG LONG AGO, IN A VILLAGE IN SOUTH INDIA, THERE LIVED A POOR, AGED SIMPLETON. HE CALLED HIMSELF PARAMARTHA. HE WAS GOOD-NATURED AND HARMLESS.



ONE DAY, AS HE WAS WALKING ALONG THE ROAD—

BLESS US, O MAHATMA.

MAY GOD'S GRACE BE WITH YOU.



YOU BLESSED US JUST ONCE THOUGH WE ARE FIVE. MAY I ASK FOR WHOM THE BLESSING WAS ?



FOR ME, OF COURSE!

BUT I TOUCHED HIS FEET FIRST!

I WAS THE ONE, YOUR HAND WAS RIGHT ABOVE MY HEAD.



THUS, OVERNIGHT, PARAMARTHA, THE SIMPLETON, BECAME GURU PARAMARTHA. HE NAMED HIS FIVE FOOLISH DISCIPLES, MADDI, MADHAYA, MILECHA, MOODHA AND PEDDA. AND SINCE ALL GURUS AND THEIR DISCIPLES LIVE IN ASHRAMS, THE SIX OF THEM BUILT ONE AND STARTED LIVING IN IT.



ONE DAY, THE GURU AND HIS DISCIPLES SET OUT FOR A TEMPLE IN A NEIGHBOURING VILLAGE. ON THE WAY —

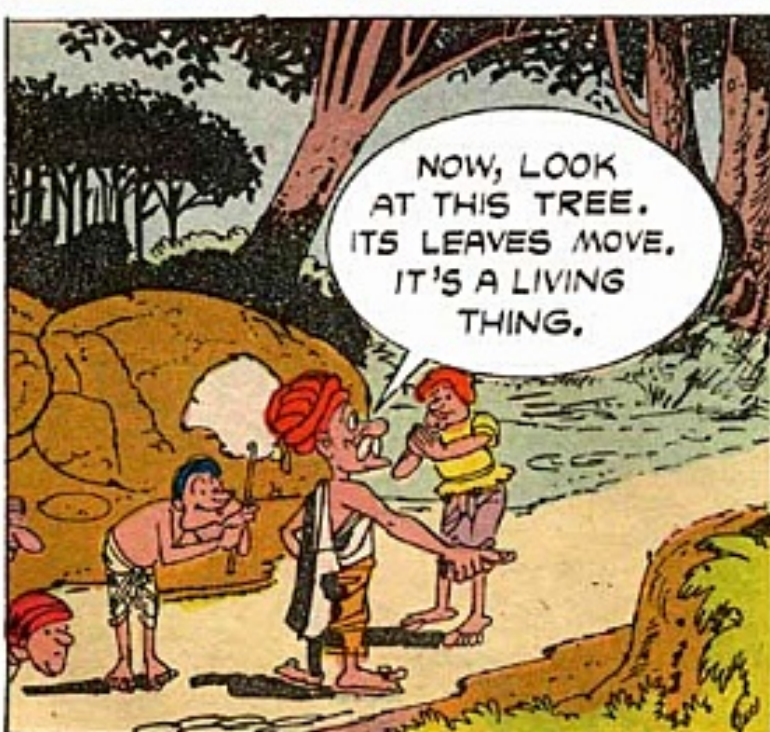


O LEARNED GURU, WHAT IS LIFE?

IT'S SO SIMPLE. LIFE IS WHAT ALL LIVING THINGS HAVE.



AND ALL LIVING THINGS MOVE.



NOW, LOOK AT THIS TREE. ITS LEAVES MOVE. IT'S A LIVING THING.



OH, GREAT GURU, YOU EXPLAIN THE MOST DIFFICULT THINGS IN THE MOST SIMPLE WAY!

WE ARE FORTUNATE TO BE YOUR DISCIPLES.

LATER IN THE EVENING, THE GURU AND HIS DISCIPLES HAD TO CROSS A RIVER.



IS THIS RIVER
A LIVING
THING?

OF COURSE, CAN'T
YOU SEE IT
MOVING?



IT MOVES. EVER
SO LITTLE, BUT
IT MOVES.



WOULD IT BE
ANGRY IF WE
CROSSED
IT?

WE MUST CROSS IT
ONLY WHEN IT'S
ASLEEP.



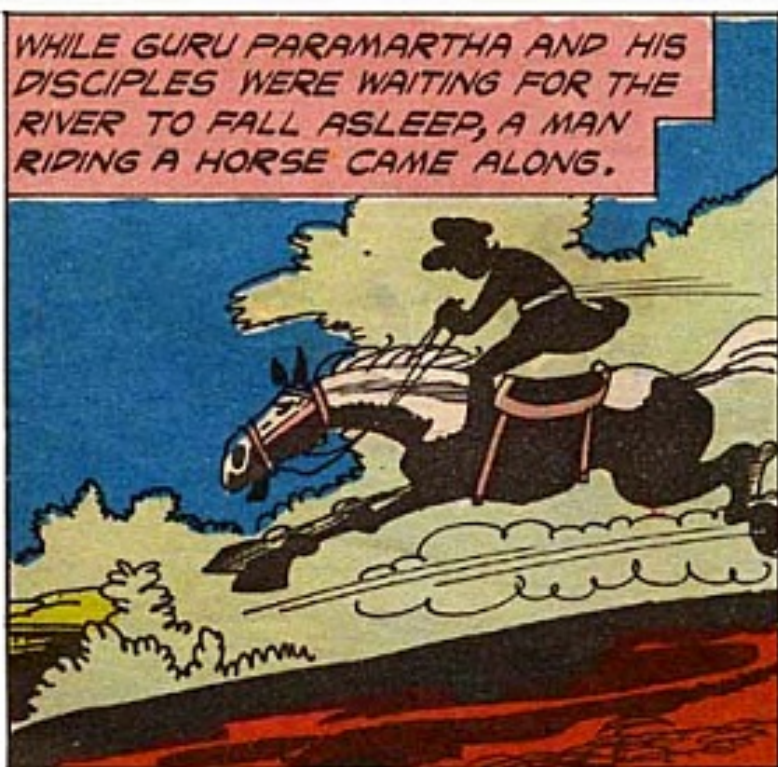
THEN I'LL GO AND
SEE WHETHER IT'S
ASLEEP.

WE'LL
WAIT HERE
FOR YOU.



I'LL PROD IT
WITH MY
TORCH.





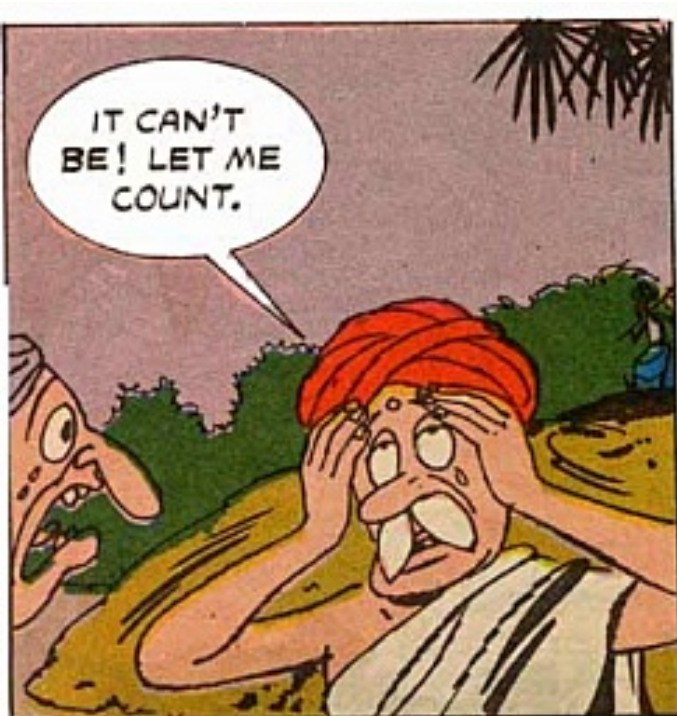


LATER, ON THE OPPOSITE BANK—



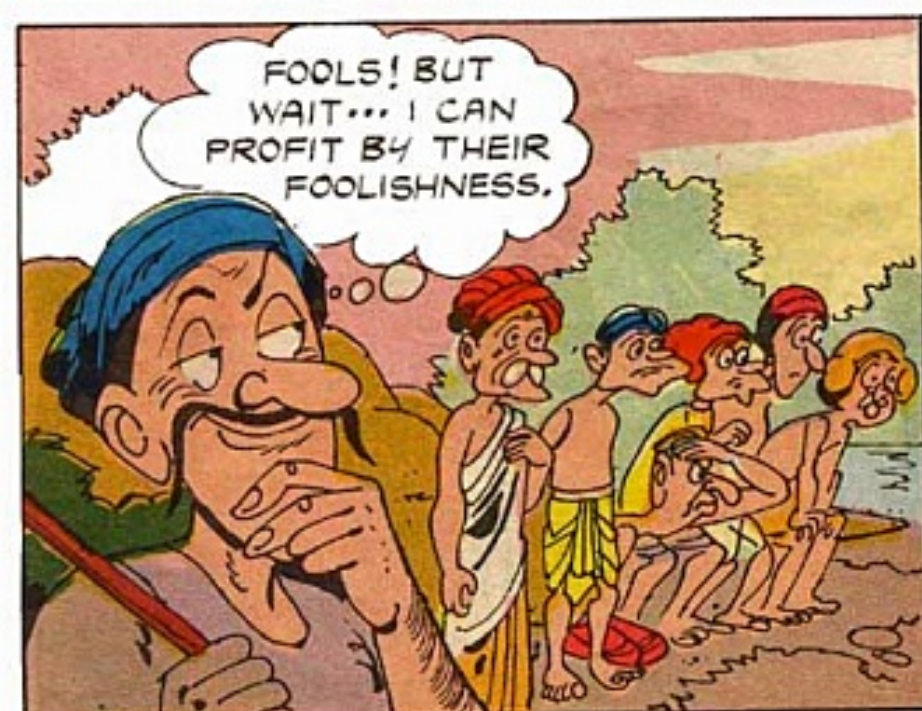
MADHAYA STARTED COUNTING.





PARAMARTHA LIKE MADHAYA, COUNTED EVERYONE EXCEPT HIMSELF.

ALAS, MY DEAR BOYS! THE RIVER HAS TAKEN ITS TOLL. WE HAVE LOST HIM, HE WON'T COME BACK.



FORTY PIECES OF SILVER.

ALL RIGHT.
CLOSE YOUR EYES
AND STAND IN
A ROW.

NOW, THE MOMENT I HIT
EACH OF YOU, CALL OUT YOUR
NAME. AND THE MISSING
FELLOW WILL APPEAR.

ONE!

OOOH...
MADDI.

TWO!

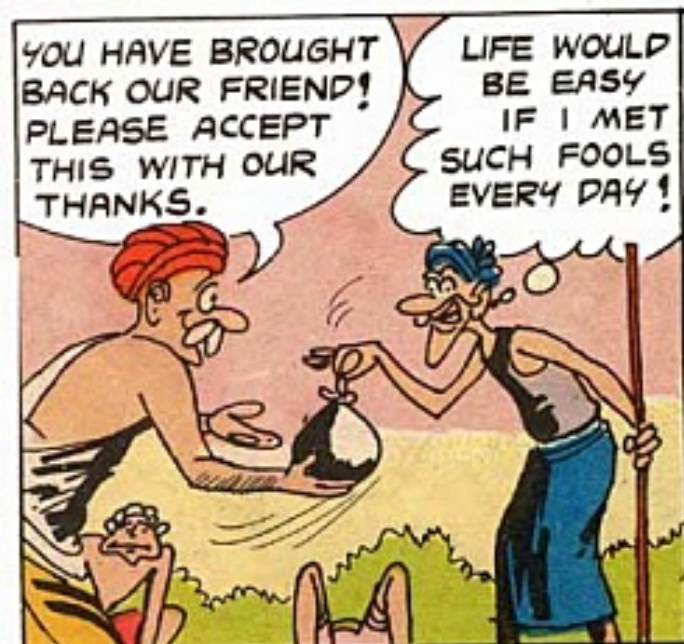
AAAH...
MILECHA.

THREE!

M-M-MADHAYA.

FOUR!

PEDDA.









EACH ONE OF THE LAZY DISCIPLES HAD HIS OWN EXCUSE.



GURU PARAMARTHA AND HIS DISCIPLES TOOK LEAVE OF THE 'EGG-SELLER'!



IT WAS A REAL PIECE OF LUCK THAT WE SAW THOSE EGGS.

IT'S ALL GOD'S WORK. HE KNEW HOW MUCH I LONGED FOR A HORSE.



AS THEY TRUDGED ON—

OOOH!
HELP! OW! THE
EGG!

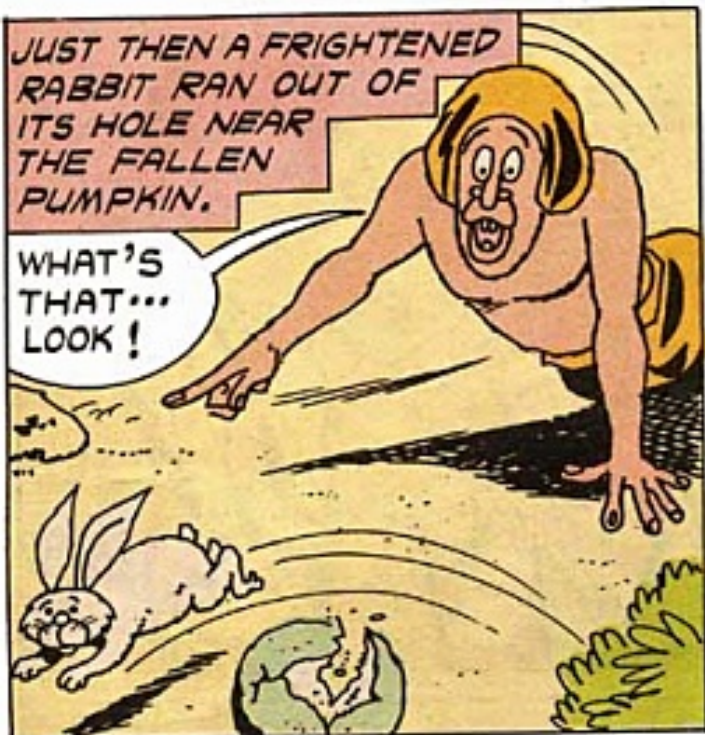


OH, NO! IT'S
BROKEN!



JUST THEN A FRIGHTENED RABBIT RAN OUT OF ITS HOLE NEAR THE FALLEN PUMPKIN.

WHAT'S THAT... LOOK!



IT'S THE BABY HORSE! DON'T LET IT GET AWAY!



WHERE HAS IT GONE? WE MUST FIND IT. WE'LL GO THIS WAY. YOU GO THAT WAY. QUICK!



LATER—

IT'S NOT HERE!

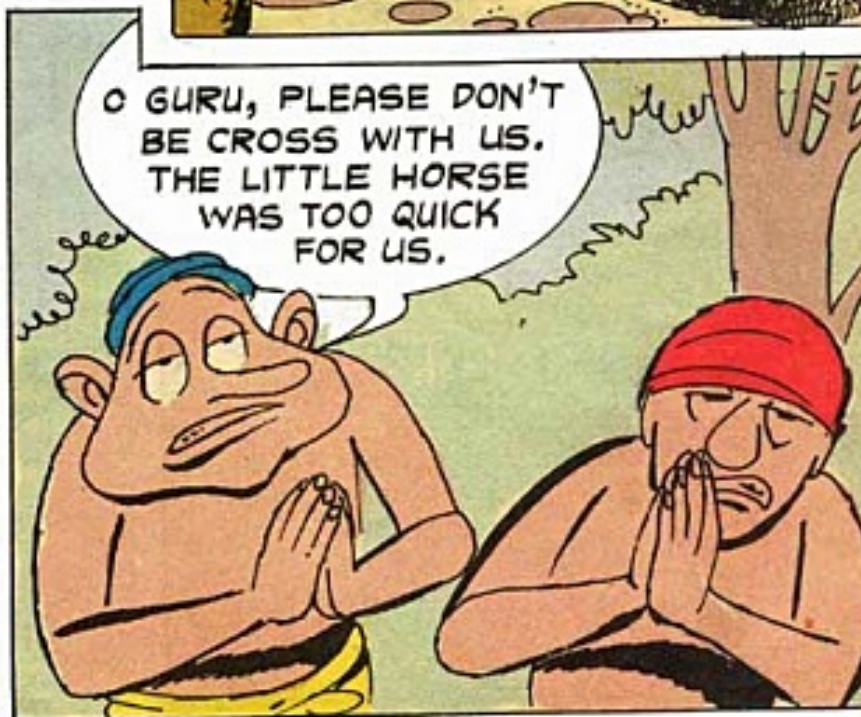
IT'S NOT HERE EITHER. LET'S GO BACK TO THE OTHERS.

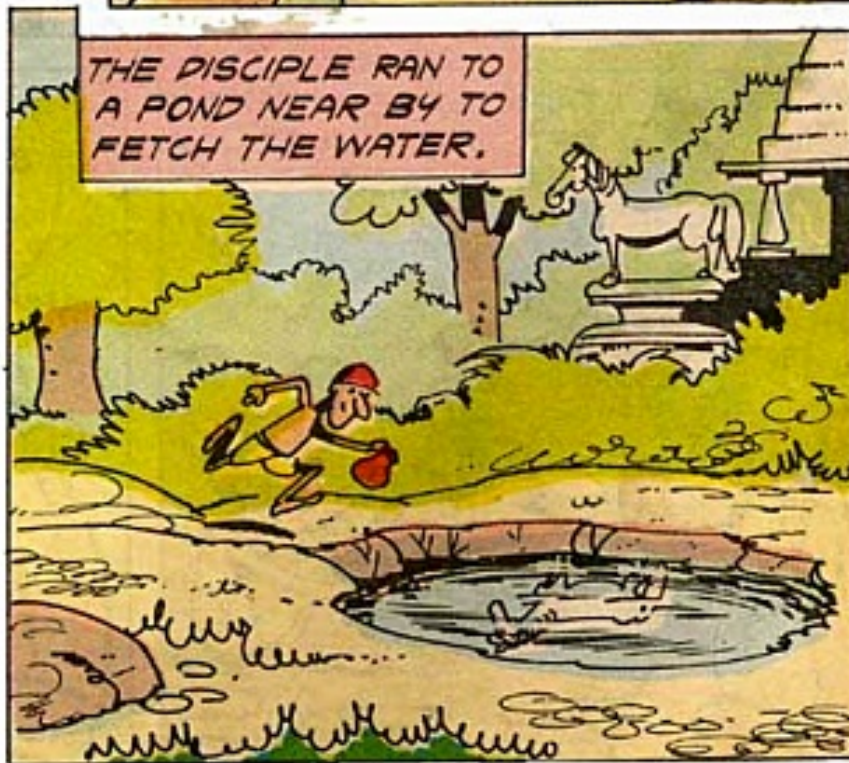
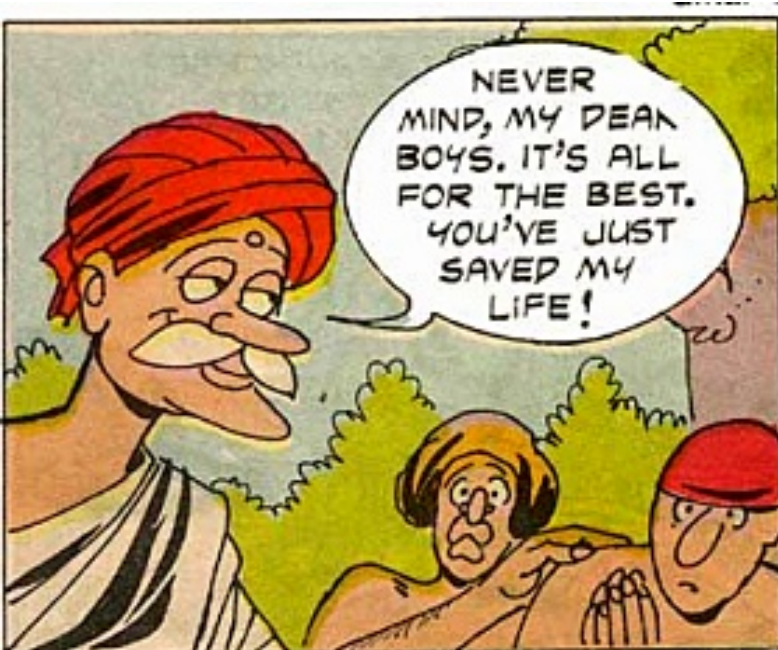


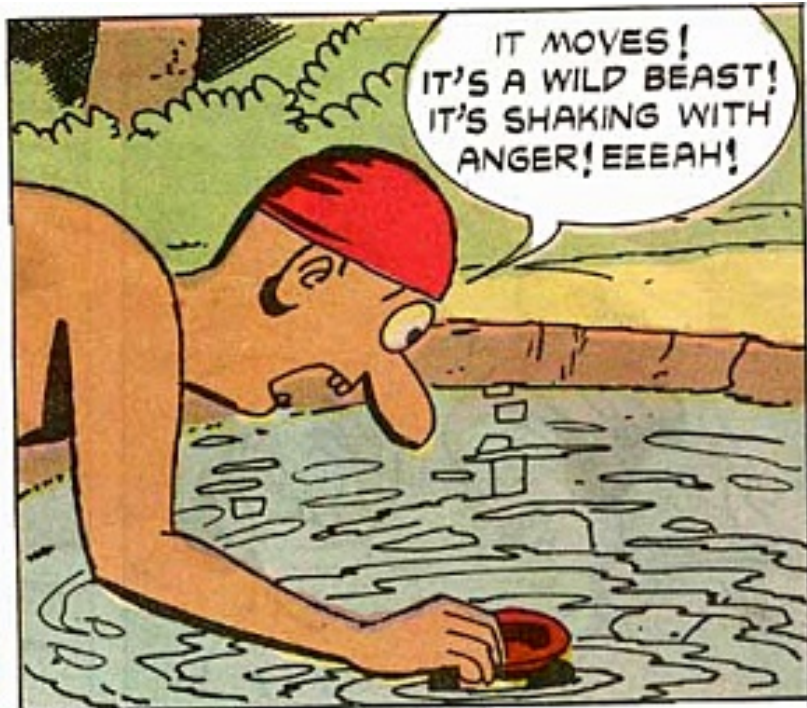
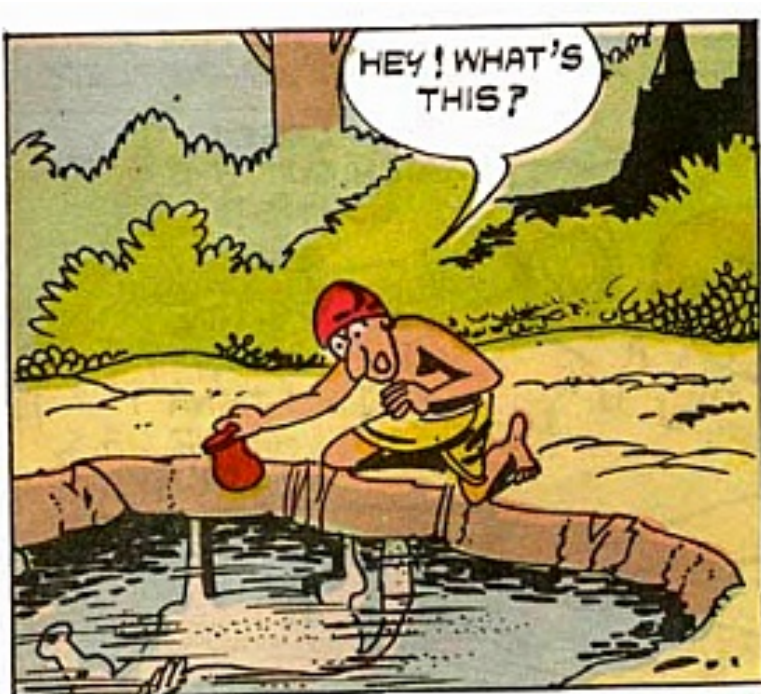
I THINK WE'VE LOST IT AFTER ALL. WHAT A SHAME!




O GURU, PLEASE DON'T BE CROSS WITH US. THE LITTLE HORSE WAS TOO QUICK FOR US.










I SAY!
WHY DON'T WE
TAKE THIS HORSE
TO OUR GURU?



JUST THEN A STRONG BREEZE RIPPLED
THE WATER.

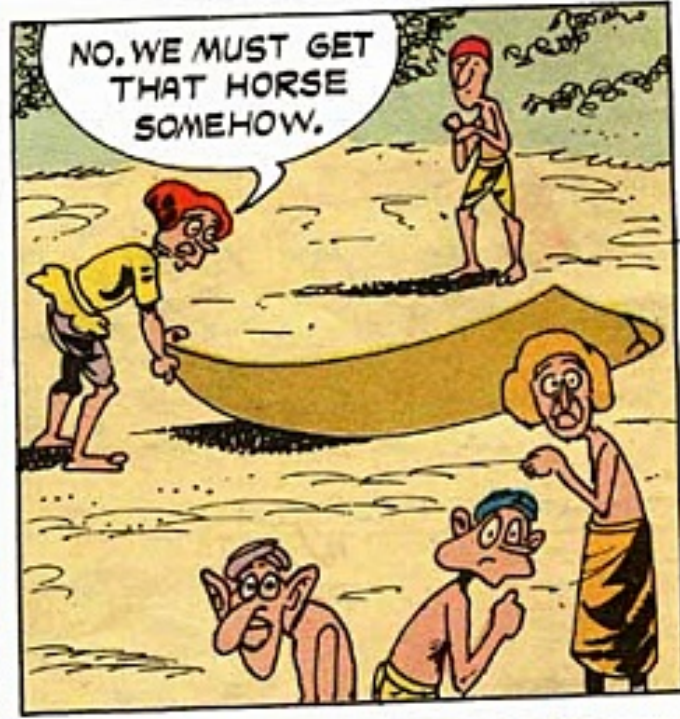
THE HORSE!
WATCH OUT! IT'S
MOVING!

IT'S
ANGRY! I...
I THINK IT
HEARD US
TALK.



PHEW!
THAT WAS
A NARROW
ESCAPE.

LET'S GO
BACK TO THE
GURU.



NO, WE MUST GET
THAT HORSE
SOMEHOW.



JUST GO
AND SEE
WHAT IT'S
DOING.



I CAN'T
WAIT TO
SEE HIS
FACE!

NOW LET'S
NOT WASTE TIME.
LET'S GET O
WORK.



WHEN THE STRANGE FISHING-TACKLE WAS READY—

SSH!
NOT A SOUND
NOW.



SH! I'LL
SAY "PULL" WHEN
THE HORSE TAKES
THE BAIT. ALL OF
YOU MUST THEN
PULL!

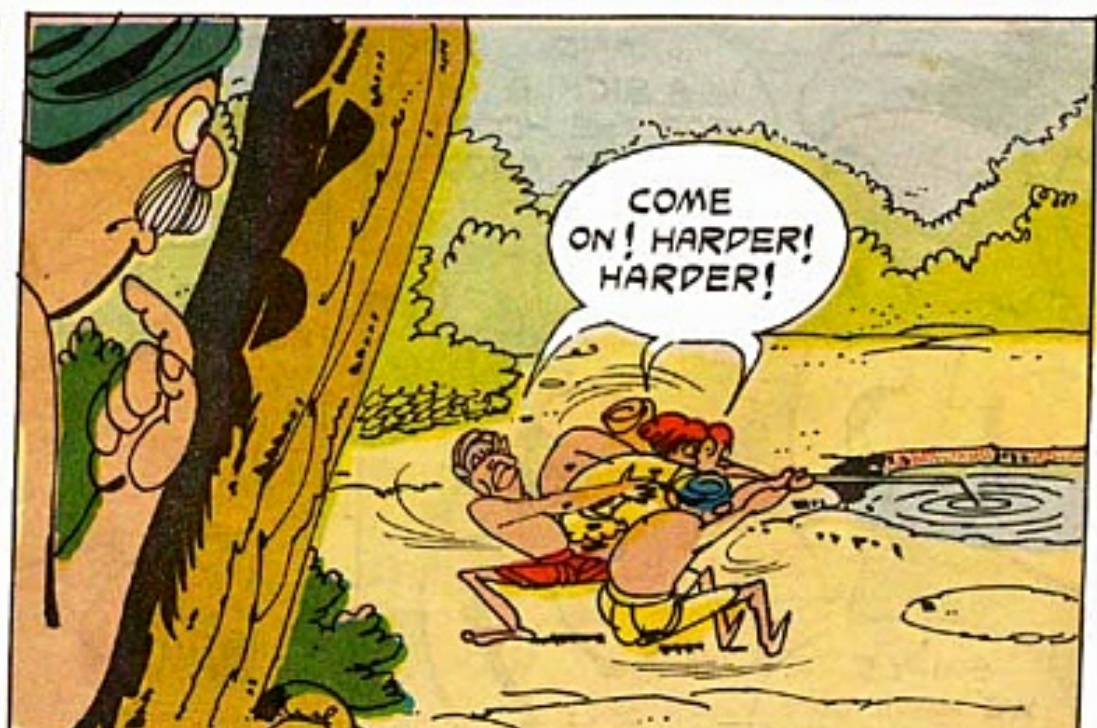


AS LUCK WOULD HAVE IT, THE END OF THE
SICKLE GOT ENTANGLED IN A BUNCH OF
WEEDS.

PULL!



COME
ON! HARDER!
HARDER!



THEY PULLED SO HARD THAT THE SICKLE CAME LOOSE AND—



THEY TOLD THE STRANGER ALL ABOUT THEIR 'FISHING EXPEDITION'!

YOU POOR FELLOWS!
WHAT YOU SAW WAS
ONLY A SHADOW!
WAIT!



WHAT ON
EARTH ARE
YOU UP TO?



LOOK
INTO THE
POND,
NOW.



IT'S GONE! THE
CLOTH MUST HAVE
FRIGHTENED IT.



I HAVE NEVER
SEEN SUCH
SIMPLETONS!

WHAT A SHAME!
WE WANTED IT FOR
OUR LEARNED GURU.
WE WANTED TO
SURPRISE HIM
WITH IT.



I HAVE AN OLD HORSE TO SPARE... YOU CAN COME AND TAKE IT IF YOU WANT.

OH, THANK YOU, THANK YOU, SIR. I'LL FETCH OUR GURU.

GURU PARAMARTHA AND HIS DISCIPLES WENT WITH THE STRANGER...



WHAT A FINE, NOBLE ANIMAL! WILL YOU HELP ME MOUNT HIM.



... TO HIS HOUSE.

HERE! HE'S ALL YOURS.

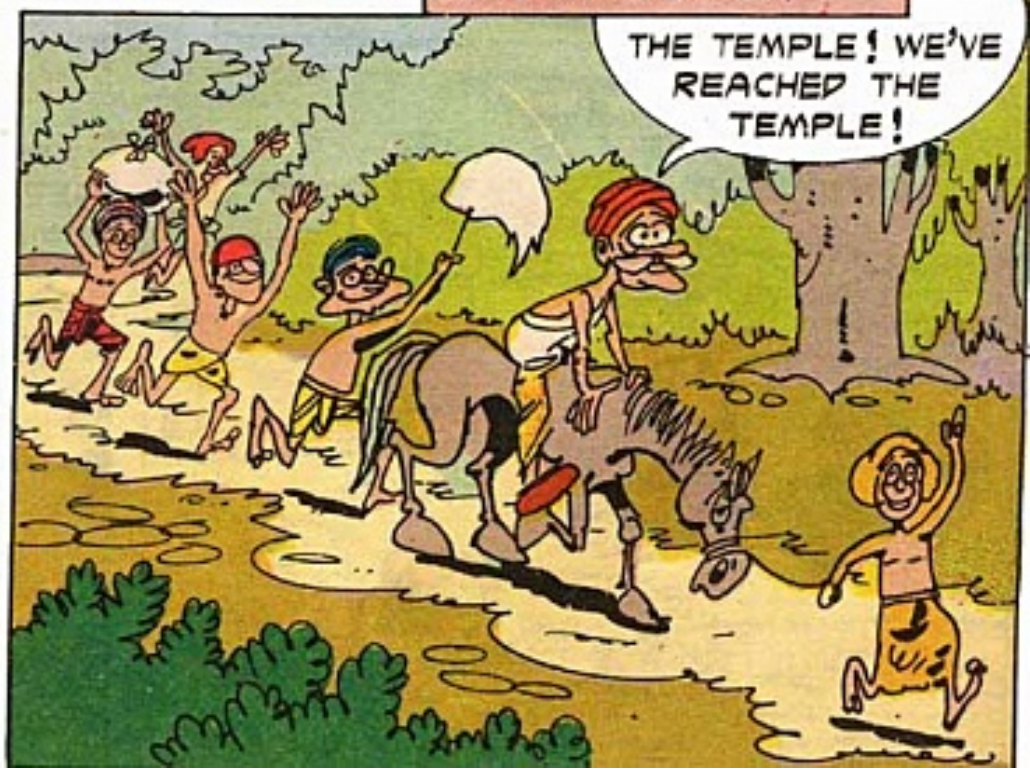


NOW LET US GO ON.



SOME TIME LATER —

THE TEMPLE! WE'VE REACHED THE TEMPLE!



A FEW DAYS LATER, GURU PARAMARTHA AND HIS DISCIPLES WERE DISCUSSING A MATTER OF GREAT IMPORTANCE.



WE CAN'T SIT HERE AND WAIT FOR THEM TO COME AND DONATE GIFTS. WE MUST GO TO THEM.

AS YOU COMMAND, O GURU.



SO NEXT MORNING, GURU PARAMARTHA AND HIS DISCIPLES SET OUT ON A FUND-RAISING TOUR.



ON THE WAY, THE GURU'S TURBAN SLIPPED FROM HIS HEAD AND FELL.



WHAT A NUISANCE! ONE OF THEM IS SURE TO PICK IT UP.



AFTER A LITTLE WHILE—

PHEW! IT'S HOT. WHERE IS MY TURBAN?

IT MUST BE FAR BEHIND US NOW.



FOOLS! DIDN'T YOU
HAVE THE SENSE
TO PICK IT UP?

FORGIVE
US, GURU. I'LL
RUN BACK
AND PICK
IT UP.

THEN GO. AND IN
FUTURE PICK UP
ANYTHING THAT'S
DROPPED ON THE
WAY AND GIVE
IT TO ME.

THE TURBAN WAS SOON RESTORED TO
THE GURU AND THE GROUP WALKED ON.

AFTER THEY HAD COVERED SOME
DISTANCE, THE GURU'S HORSE
DROPPED SOME PUNG.

QUICK! PICK
IT UP.

THE
HORSE DROPPED
THIS ON THE
WAY.

GOD HELP ME!
NOW ISN'T THIS
THE LIMIT!

WHY
ARE YOU
CROSS WITH
ME?

YOU ASKED US TO PICK UP WHATEVER WAS DROPPED AND I OBEYED YOU.

IF WE DON'T PICK UP WHAT IS DROPPED, OUR GURU IS CROSS. IF WE DO, HE'S CROSS. I'M UTTERLY CONFUSED, HOW ARE WE TO SERVE HIM?



DON'T WORRY. YOU'LL LEARN BY EXPERIENCE AND I AM ALWAYS THERE TO GUIDE YOU.

PERHAPS IF YOU GIVE US A LIST OF ALL THE THINGS WHICH HAVE TO BE PICKED UP, WE COULD SERVE YOU BETTER



GURU PARAMARTHA MADE THE LIST AND GAVE IT TO HIS DISCIPLES.

SEE THAT YOU FOLLOW IT STRICTLY. GO BY THE RULE. ALWAYS.

DON'T WORRY GURU. RULES ARE RULES AND WE WILL NEVER BREAK THEM.



AS THEY WENT FURTHER ALONG THE ROUGH ROAD, THE HORSE STUMBLER.

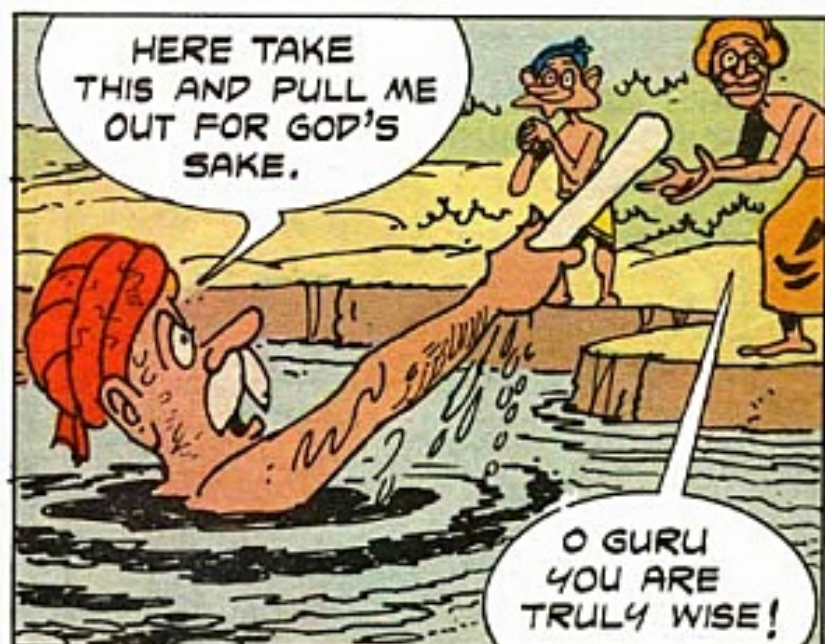
MADDI, MOODHA, PEDDA...
HOLD ME! HOLD ME,
SOMEONE!

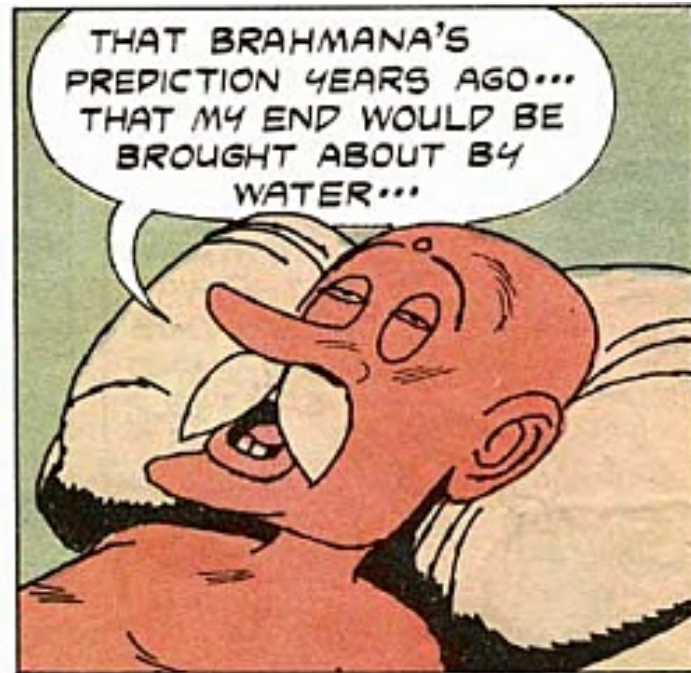






WITH GREAT DIFFICULTY
GURU PARAMARTHA SOMEHOW
MANAGED TO ADD HIS OWN
NAME TO THE LIST.





THERE'S
A LOT TO BE
DONE.

THE GREAT
MAHATMA MUST
HAVE A GRAND
FUNERAL.

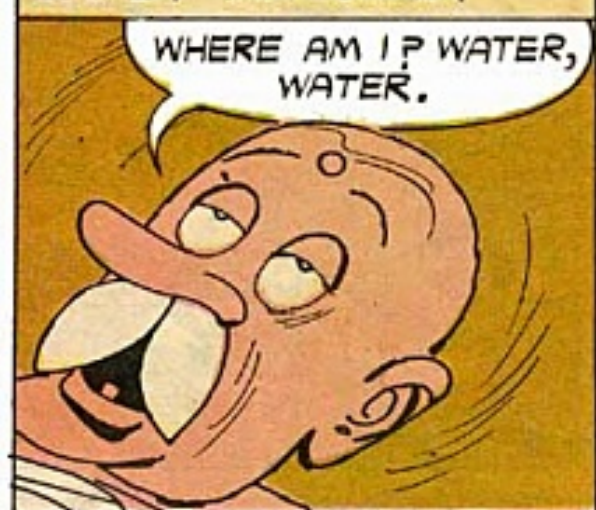
SOLEMNLY THEY CARRIED THE
BODY TO THE CREMATORY...



...AND PLACED IT ON THE
PYRE. THEN THEY BEGAN
CHANTING HYMNS.



AS THEIR VOICES GREW
LOUDER AND LOUDER—



WHERE AM I? WATER,
WATER.

IT'S
A GHOST!

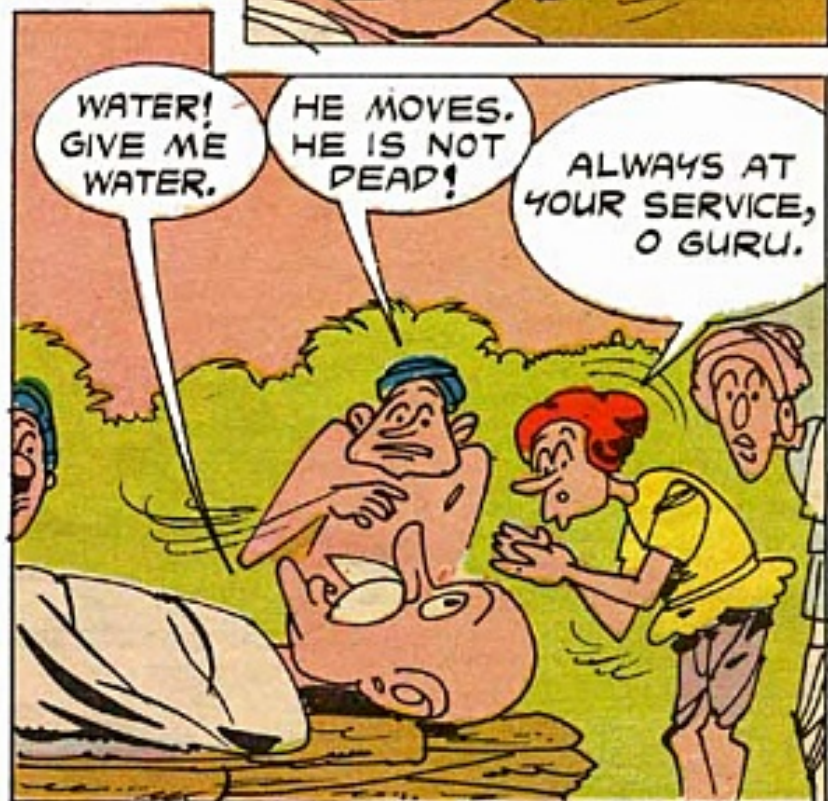
A SPIRIT
HAS POSSESSED
HIS CORPSE!



WATER!
GIVE ME
WATER.

HE MOVES.
HE IS NOT
DEAD!

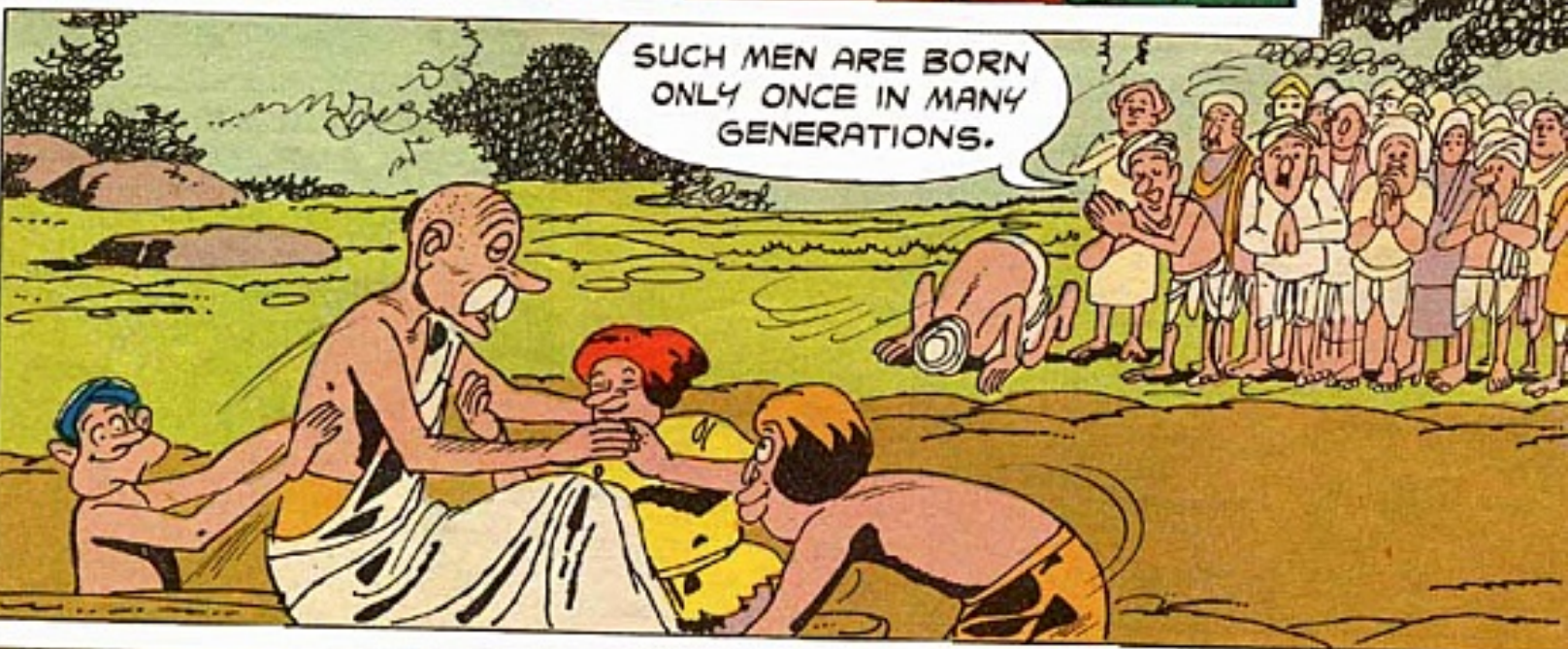
ALWAYS AT
YOUR SERVICE,
O GURU.





IT'S
A MIRACLE! THE
DEAD SAINT HAS
COME ALIVE.

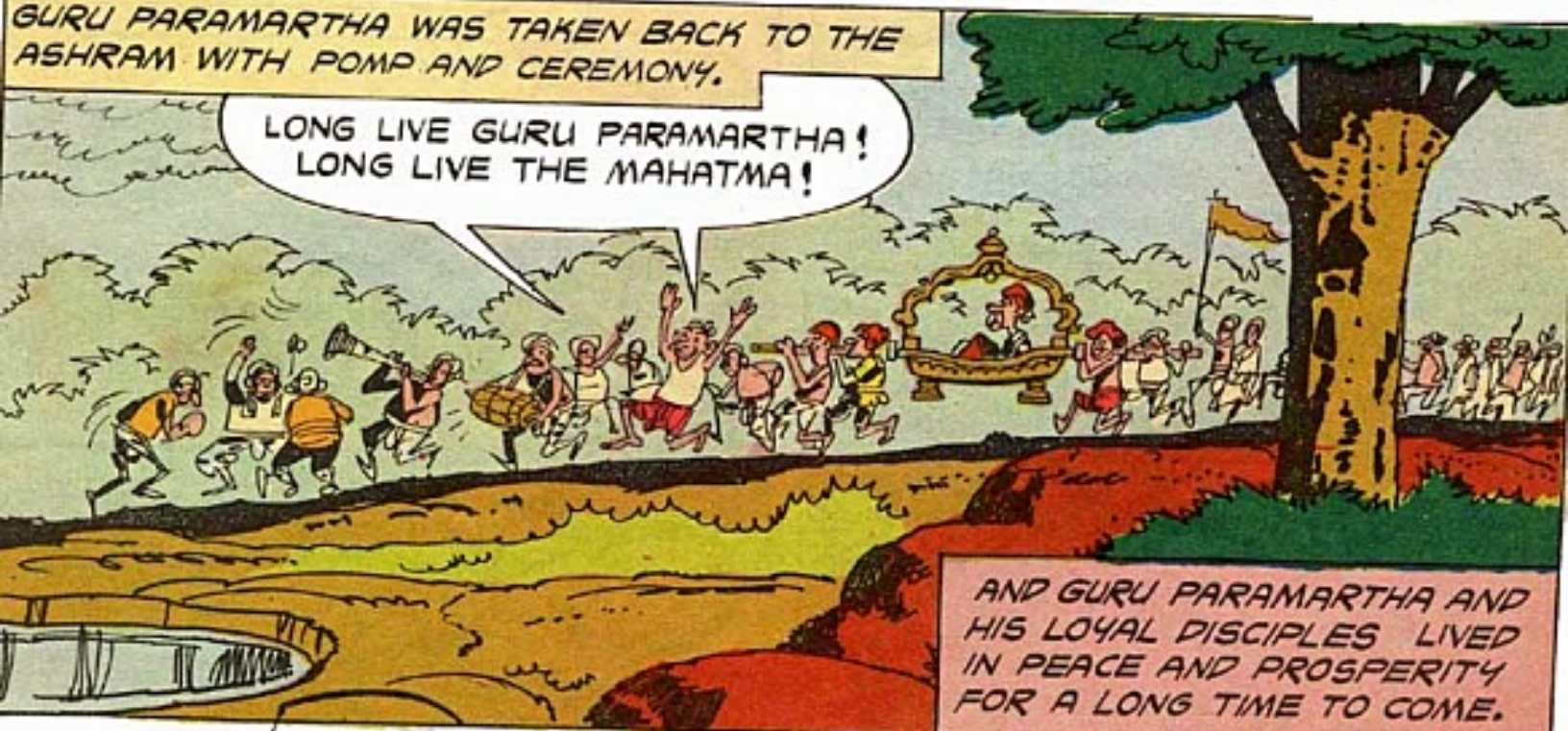
HE IS TRULY
A MAHATMA!



SUCH MEN ARE BORN
ONLY ONCE IN MANY
GENERATIONS.

GURU PARAMARTHA WAS TAKEN BACK TO THE
ASHRAM WITH POMP AND CEREMONY.

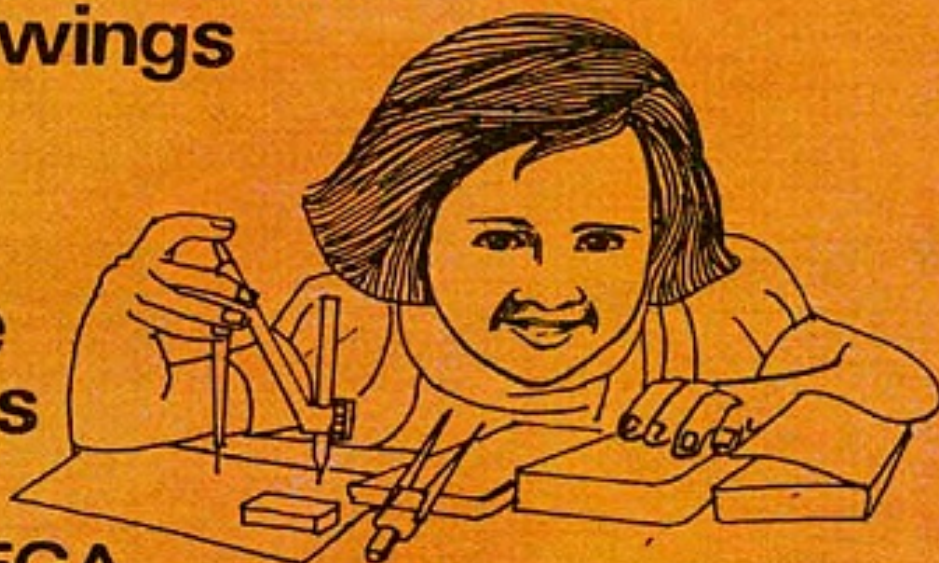
LONG LIVE GURU PARAMARTHA!
LONG LIVE THE MAHATMA!



AND GURU PARAMARTHA AND
HIS LOYAL DISCIPLES LIVED
IN PEACE AND PROSPERITY
FOR A LONG TIME TO COME.

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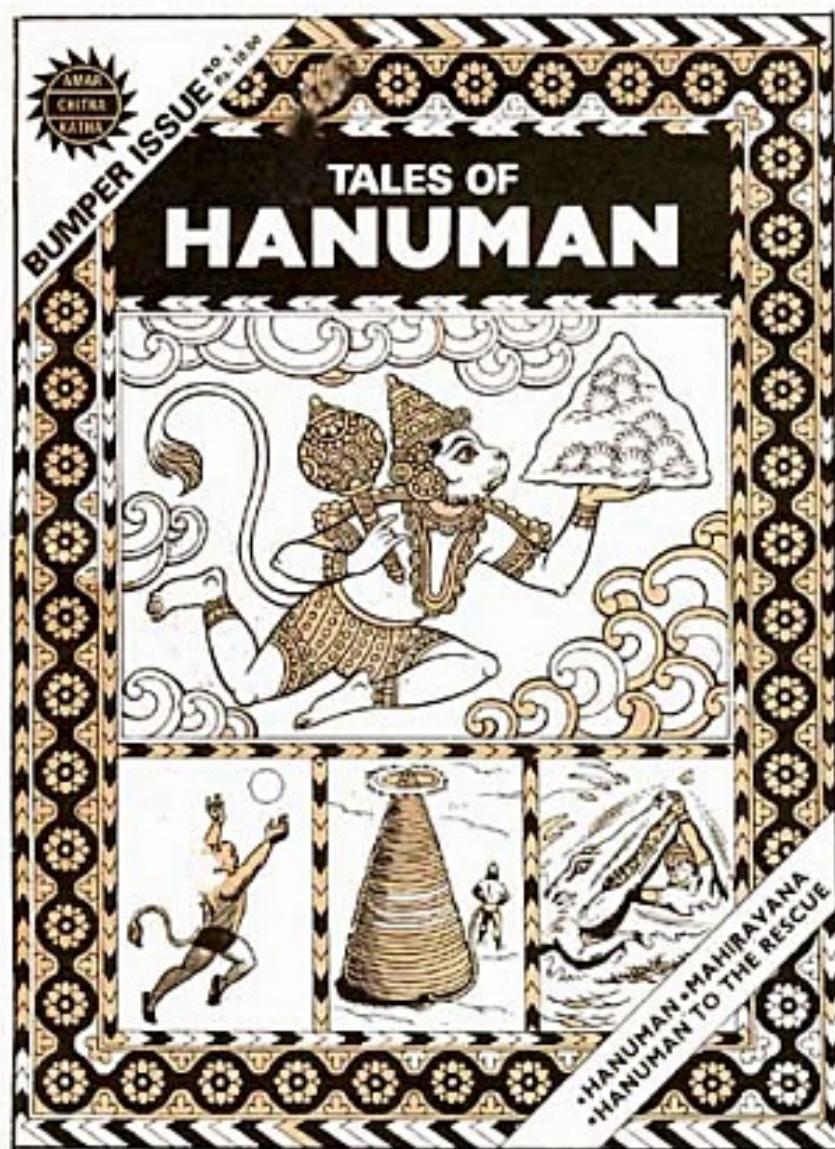
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